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ABSTRACT

Performing Arts Psychology has recently emerged as a unique subspecialty comparable to that of Sports Psychology. Attention has been focused on problems common to all performers (e.g., performance anxiety); however, the various stresses within each art form often remain hidden from view. To assess the psychological aspects of different art forms, this study compared two groups of professionals in dance and music. Dancers were members of two national ballet companies and had achieved either soloist or principal status. Musicians were violinists and violists who performed in a variety of solo positions. Performers (N=48) completed demographic information and were then administered measures of personality and occupational stress, strain, and coping. The results revealed that the dancers were less educated than the musicians, a fact that can lead to problems with career transitions. Dancers also experienced greater occupational stress due to conflicting demands from their dance supervisors and unclear professional evaluations. Musicians, who are subjected to an enforced equality between the sexes, reported more interpersonal strain. Negative personality traits (e.g., hostility) were present in both professions, but were highlighted in male performers. The men used fewer rational/cognitive coping skills, had less social support, and reported more symptoms associated with poor health. These data suggest that job-related stress varies according to the art form and that male performers may be less able to cope effectively. (Author/NB)

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Personality and Occupational Stress in Elite Performers

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Abstract

Performing Arts Psychology has recently emerged as a unique subspecialty comparable to that of Sports Psychology. Attention has been focused on problems common to all performers (e.g., performance anxiety); however, the various stresses within each art form often remain hidden from view. To assess the psychological aspects of different art forms, the present study compared two groups of professionals in dance and music. Forty-eight leading performers completed demographic information and were then administered measures of personality and occupational stress, strain, and coping. The results revealed that the dancers were less educated than the musicians; a fact that can lead to problems with career transitions. This group also experienced greater occupational stress, due to conflicting demands from their dance supervisors and unclear professional evaluations. Musicians, who are subjected to an enforced equality between the sexes, reported more interpersonal strain. Negative personality traits (e.g., hostility) were present in both professions, but were highlighted in male performers. The men used fewer rational/cognitive coping skills, had less social support, and reported more symptoms associated with poor health. These data suggest that job-related stress varies according to the art form and that male performers may be less able to cope effectively. As knowledge of these professionals increases, treatment programs should be made available to the performing arts' community.

Introduction

Performing Arts Psychology is a growing area of specialization that is designed to meet the unique needs of professional artists (Pruett, 1991). Over the last decade, issues related to personality and occupational stress have become a primary focus of attention. However, although this line of research is informative, it rarely goes beyond generalities to pinpoint specific problems within each art form. The present study seeks to expand our current knowledge base through an analysis of elite performers in dance and music.

Forty-eight leading dancers and musicians were surveyed from the New York area. All of the dancers were members of two national ballet companies, and had achieved either soloist or principal status. The musicians were violinists and violists who performed in a variety of solo positions (e.g., chamber music group, recitals, and orchestras). All were members of Local 802 Associated Musicians of Greater NY.

The subjects filled out questionnaires that measured the following: age, education, onset of training in the arts, professional experience, and current work schedule. Their psychological profile also was determined, using Measures of Occupational Stress, Strain, and Coping (Osipow & Spokane, 1983), and the Adult Personality Inventory (Krug, 1984).

Two-way ANOVA's were carried out using sex and occupational group as the independent variables. Comparisons between the performers revealed that the musicians were older

than the dancers (34 vs 29 years), and were considerably more educated. In the latter case, the percentage of performers who had completed college was tabulated; 68% of the musicians had received their degrees compared to 15% of the dancers. In addition, 47% of the musicians had pursued a graduate education. The onset of training in the arts also was found to vary. Classes began approximately 20 months earlier for musicians than dancers. However, no significant differences were found for professional activity. Both groups had been employed as professionals for 12 years, and had performed approximately forty weeks in the past year.

Insert Table 1 about here

Comparisons between the women revealed that the musicians were less caring in their interpersonal relationships than the dancers (See Table 1). The musicians also differed markedly from the norm on 10 personality traits, 50% of which were negative (e.g., hostility). However, their personal adjustment was not compromised. The dancers were similar to the norm, except for having more competitive and aesthetic careers. In terms of occupational stress, both groups were above the 60th percentile for stress due to their physical environment, which included erratic work schedules and personal isolation. In addition, the dancers experienced significantly more stress than the musicians because of conflicting demands and loyalties with

their supervisors, and complained of ambiguous criteria used for their professional evaluations. On the positive side, both groups were below the 40th percentile for mood problems, and stress arising from poor vocational attitudes, supervisory responsibilities, and lack of success. The female dancers also had fewer physical illnesses than the norm.

Insert Table 2 about here

Comparisons between the male musicians and dancers also revealed significant differences. The musicians were more enterprising and social than the ballet dancers. Furthermore, both groups had personality profiles that differed dramatically from the norm. The musicians deviated on fifteen traits, whereas, the dancers differed on 16 traits. Eight-seven percent were in the negative direction and both groups were poorly adjusted. Similar to the women, the men scored above the 60th percentile for stress arising from their work schedules, with the dancers exhibiting more symptoms than the musicians. The male dancers also complained of additional occupational stress due to unclear professional evaluations. Both groups scored above the 60th percentile for mood problems, disruptions in their personal relationships, and physical illness. They were below the 40th percentile for social support and used fewer rational/ cognitive coping strategies than the norm. However, all the

male performers had an excellent attitude about their vocation, and the musicians were above the 60th percentile for habits associated with self-care. Neither group experienced the usual stress associated with supervisory responsibilities.

The data from this study suggest that personality and occupational stress in performing artists differ from both the general population and within each art form. In general, years of training and solitary practice are needed in order to become an artist. As professional status is reached, erratic work schedules are common, due to impromptu rehearsals and touring. Special effects, and high levels of noise, wetness, and cold also create a difficult physical environment (Rossol, 1986). However, further stressors are imposed depending on each art form, where dance and music exert their own unique constraints.

In dance, pressure is placed on the performer to please several dance masters, who rarely provide feedback regarding the dancers' performance. Our results indicated that the dancers were often unclear as to the criteria used in their professional evaluations. This is particularly stressful, because casting dictates whether or not they perform on a weekly basis. As one leading dancer put it, "When you don't get parts, you feel like an orphan" Unfortunately, there is very little that a dancer can do.

Another stress linked to ballet appears to arise from the inequalities between the sexes, where the psychological

profiles differed dramatically. Generally speaking, ballet tends to focus on the ballerina, while limiting the male to only occasional moments of technical display. Research on masculine gender-role stress suggests that most men experience high levels of anger and anxiety if they are outperformed at work by the opposite sex, or are in an occupation where female behaviors are required (Eisler, Skidmore, & Ward, 1988). In our study, male dancers were less enterprising, more depressed, and less adjusted in comparison to the norm, whereas the women reported fewer mood fluctuations and were genuinely fulfilled from their work. Taken together, this suggests that women may be favored in ballet.

This wasn't the case in music. Although males once again showed the most significant impairment, the women also differed markedly from the norm. Unlike ballet dancers, musicians are subjected to an enforced equality. Since World War II when women filled the ranks of absent men, auditions have been conducted sight unseen. This has helped women to get around a longstanding bias against them. They now get to perform, although over 90% of the conductors and personnel managers are still men.

On an interpersonal level, this ostensible equality can translate into constant vying between men and women for a say on small artistic decisions. In our sample, both sexes were significantly more hostile and less caring and adaptive than the general population. Yet, only male musicians were

significantly less adjusted and withdrawn, whereas the women were notably more independent and fulfilled from their work. In a musical career, women may have to become more autonomous to counteract the subtle forms of discrimination. Men, on the other hand, may be uncomfortable with the enforced equality and choose to withdraw.

A final issue for all male performers has to do with their significant health concerns in comparison to the norm. While this issue was not a focus of our study, it's conceivable that it may be linked, in part, to the AIDS' epidemic. Future research should address this issue, with an eye towards providing necessary education and support.

To conclude, the treatment of performing artists has resulted in more than twenty Institutes around the country that specialize in this area. As knowledge of this population grows, interventions can be further tailored to meet the needs of this community. We believe that psychological services can play an important role in alleviating occupational stress within different art forms, as well as enhancing the performer's personal adjustment during the course of their career.

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Table 1

The Personality Profiles of Female Performers

Traits	Musicians	Dancers	Norms
Extraverted	5.71	5.16	6.01
Adjusted	5.34	5.95	6.17
Tough-minded	5.21[a]	5.59	6.42
Independent	7.62[a]	5.95	6.92
Disciplined	5.52	5.67	6.46
Creative	8.02[a a]	7.35	6.54
Enterprising	7.14	6.44	7.24
Caring	4.70[a] **	6.82	6.24
Adaptive	3.84[a a]	5.48	5.72
Withdrawn	4.41	5.21	5.19
Submissive	4.92	4.79	4.84
Hostile	6.20[a a]	5.14	4.45
Rebellious	6.38[a a]	5.55	4.47
Sociable	6.61[a]	5.81	5.02
Assertive	5.72	5.69	6.30
Practical	5.21	6.34	5.32
Scientific	7.72	6.36	6.52
Aesthetic	8.62[a a a]	7.93[b b]	6.60
Social	5.57	5.09	5.23
Competitive	7.99[a]	7.62[b b]	6.12
Structured	4.88	5.64	6.09

Musicians vs. dancers: *P<0.05 **P<0.01 ***P<0.001

[a]Musicians vs. the norm; [b]Dancers vs. the norm.

Table 2

The Personality Profiles of Male Performers

Traits	Musicians	Dancers	Norms
Extraverted	4.26^{aaa}	4.44^{bbb}	6.81
Adjusted	3.99^{aaa}	4.68^{bbb}	6.48
Tough-minded	3.05^{aaa}	3.68^{bbb}	5.11
Independent	6.59	6.61	6.53
Disciplined	4.35^{aaa}	4.03^{bbb}	7.56
Creative	8.56^{aaa}	8.03^{bb}	6.47
Enterprising	7.20^{aa} ***	5.17^{bbb}	8.84
Caring	3.92^{aaa}	4.56^{bbb}	6.53
Adaptive	4.49^{a}	4.95	5.85
Withdrawn	5.73^{a}	5.70^{bb}	4.47
Submissive	5.78^{aa}	5.29^{b}	4.26
Hostile	5.98^{aa}	5.72^{bb}	4.20
Rebellious	5.89^{aaa}	6.68^{bbb}	3.87
Sociable	5.78	6.02	5.14
Assertive	4.16^{aaa}	4.54^{bbb}	7.13
Practical	5.12	5.58	5.50
Scientific	6.31	6.14^{b}	7.19
Aesthetic	8.27^{aaa}	8.21^{bbb}	6.46
Social	6.27*	4.45^{bbb}	6.28
Competitive	6.29	6.41	7.18
Structured	3.98^{aaa}	4.19^{bb}	6.35

Musicians vs. dancers: *P<0.05 **P<0.01 ***P<0.001

^{a}Musicians vs. the norm; ^{b}Dancers vs. the norm.